

# It's being built; they will come

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By Ruth Fordon



The new ball field at the end of Maurice Ballance Road is taking shape. Photo by C. Leinbach

Ocracoke's long-held dream of having a bona fide baseball field to host home games will soon be fulfilled.

Decades in the dreaming, and four years into the making, the baseball field at the Ocracoke Community Park is expected to be completed "by the end of this fall," according to Vince O'Neal, president of the Ocracoke Community Park organization.

What began in 2010 when the Ocracoke Youth Center, an island nonprofit, started teaching basic baseball skills to the island children has truly become a major, community-supported field of dreams.

In 2011, there was enough interest from the kids that the OYC contacted the Hatteras Island league to see if Ocracoke could participate with them in the Cal Ripken Division of Babe Ruth Little League Baseball.

This has required off-island travel for all Ocracoke players. And yet, the response from the youth continues to fuel the project. Out of 170 students enrolled in Ocracoke School pre-K through 12th grade last year, more than 80 students participated in baseball from T-ball through middle school.

In 2012, the first step toward the dream of a home field became a reality with the purchase of the Burrus property.

It was the last suitable and sizeable land within the village to accommodate the project, and the Burrus family agreed to 100 percent owner financing, with 3 percent interest and a 10-year-term. The Youth Center took possession of the property May 1, 2013, and by July of that same year, approximately \$750,00 in pledges and donations had been received.

Funds for the project have come not only from the Ocracoke community, but also from the extended Outer Banks community. Barbara Jemison, treasurer for the Park, said that as of April 30, donations to the project were \$180,867 toward the capital fund for land acquisition with \$800,000 in pledges.

The Ocracoke Occupancy Board has provided over \$240,000 to date, and more than \$100,000 of labor costs have been donated as well. The Outer Banks Community Foundation awarded their largest grant of \$75,000 toward the purchase of the land over a three-year period, according to Lorelei Costa, executive director at the OBCF.

“It was much needed on the island,” she said. “We are really excited to support the park. It’s been gratifying to watch the community come together for this project, especially the fundraising efforts and the incredible volunteer work.”

OBCF will also provide a \$7,000 three-year, matching challenge grant for a designated, permanent endowment for the Park. Other revenues from the OYC Village Thrift store and fundraising bring the total of money received to \$351,708.

Today, thanks to the dedication and enthusiastic efforts of the Ocracoke community, volunteers and financial donors, those two acres of marshland located at the end of Maurice Ballance Road is well on the way to becoming the Ocracoke Community Park with not only a baseball field, but also a 2400 sq. ft. activity center and recreational trails for environmental education and fitness.

“The Activity Center building is phase two (of the project) and is scheduled to be completed after the park is functioning,” O’Neal said. “There has been tremendous support from all—residents, tourists, and businesses. Probably the biggest obstacle is the same one all construction projects face on the island—coordinating logistics and sub-contractors to do the work.”

If you would like to make a donation to the Ocracoke Community Park, checks can be made to: Ocracoke Youth Center, P.O. Box 1684, Ocracoke, NC 27960. Please designate your checks to the Community Park. Donations can also be made online at [ocracokecommunitypark.org](http://ocracokecommunitypark.org).

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